



# Special Report

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## The Benefits of Health Reform In Alaska

Together, the *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* and the *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act* will ensure that all Alaskans have access to quality, affordable health insurance. The Congressional Budget Office has determined that these two bills are fully paid for, will bend the health care cost curve, and will reduce the deficit by \$143 billion over the next ten years with further deficit reduction in the following decade. The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* and the *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act* will reduce the cost of health care for the middle class, ensure health security to seniors, and provide tax credits to small businesses and individuals to further reduce the cost of health coverage.

### Key Benefits for Alaska

- Provide tax credits for up to **10,118** Alaska small businesses to help make coverage more affordable. [Department of Health and Human Services analysis of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey-Insurance Component, 2008]
- Prohibit insurance companies from excluding coverage of pre-existing conditions for the **183,546** children in Alaska, starting this year. [U.S. Census Bureau, [1/7/10](#)]
- Close the ‘donut hole’ and improve other Medicare benefits for **59,400** Alaska seniors. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)]
- Reduce Medicare premiums for the **59,000** Alaska seniors who are *not* enrolled in Medicare Advantage and will no longer subsidize these private insurance plans. [Senate Finance Committee]
- Ensure affordable coverage options for **120,000** Alaskans who are uninsured and **27,000** Alaskans who purchase health insurance through the individual market. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)]
  - Ensure immediate access to affordable insurance options for as many as **16,519** uninsured Alaskans who have a pre-existing condition. [staff estimate using Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), [4/09](#) and HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)]
  - Provide tax credits for up to **52,600** Alaskans to help make health insurance more affordable, bringing **\$850 million** in premium and cost-sharing tax credits into Alaska during the first five years of the health insurance Exchange. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#); Senate Finance Committee]
  - Reduce family health insurance premiums by **\$2,030 - \$2,900** for the same benefits, as compared to what they would be without health reform by 2016. [Senate Finance Committee estimate based on CBO, [11/30/09](#)]
  - Provide access to Medicaid for **49,996** newly-eligible Alaskans, and provide **\$2 billion** in federal funding for the cost of their coverage. [Urban Institute, [1/25/10](#); Senate Finance Committee]

- Create **700 - 1,200** jobs by reducing health care costs for employers. [U.S. Public Interest Research Group, [1/20/10](#)]
- Allow **76,354** young adults to stay on their parents' insurance plans. [U.S. Census Bureau, [1/7/10](#)]
- Provide more federal funding for **174** Community Health Centers in Alaska. [National Association of Community Health Centers, [2009](#)]

## ***Affordable Coverage Options for Alaska Small Businesses***

Small businesses make up **78.4** percent of all Alaska businesses, yet just **31.6** percent of these small businesses are able to offer health insurance to their employees. [AHRQ, accessed [3/20/10](#); AHRQ, accessed [3/20/10](#)] Starting this year, up to **10,118** Alaska small businesses will be eligible for tax credits for a percentage of their contribution to their employees' health insurance. [Department of Health and Human Services analysis of the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey-Insurance Component, 2008] Small businesses of the size that qualify for these tax credits employ **47,353** Alaskans. [AHRQ, accessed [3/20/10](#)]

## ***Protecting Children***

Recognizing the special vulnerability of children, health reform prohibits insurance companies from excluding coverage of pre-existing conditions for the **183,546** children in Alaska. This takes effect six months after enactment and applies to all new plans. [U.S. Census Bureau, [1/7/10](#)]

## ***Strengthening Medicare for Alaska Seniors***

Health reform improves Medicare benefits for the **59,400** Medicare beneficiaries in Alaska. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)] Each year, **10,600** Alaska seniors hit the Medicare Part D 'donut hole.' [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)] Starting this year, seniors who hit this gap in their prescription drug coverage will receive a \$250 check, and the 'donut hole' will be completely closed by 2020. The **59,400** Medicare beneficiaries in Alaska will see other improvements to the program, including a free, annual wellness visit and no cost-sharing for prevention services. Finally, by gradually moving to a more fair payment system for private insurance companies who participate in Medicare Advantage, health reform will lower Medicare costs for the **59,000** Alaska seniors *not* enrolled in Medicare Advantage, by as much as \$45 in premium costs each year. [Senate Finance Committee]

## ***Affordable Coverage Options for Alaskans***

The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* and the *Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act* contain several provisions to expand affordable coverage options for millions of Americans. First, health reform will provide immediate access to quality, affordable health insurance for as many as **16,519** uninsured Alaskans who are unable to obtain health insurance because of a pre-existing condition. [staff estimate using AHRQ, [4/09](#) and HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)] This new \$5 billion program will take effect 90 days after enactment of health reform.

Second, health reform will ensure that the **120,000** uninsured Alaskans and **27,000** Alaskans who purchase health insurance through the individual market have access to affordable health insurance options through state-based health insurance Exchanges. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)] By reforming the insurance market and forcing insurance companies to compete for

business through the Exchange, health reform will reduce family health insurance premiums by **\$2,030 - \$2,900** for the same benefits. [Senate Finance Committee estimate based on CBO, [11/30/09](#)] In addition, **52,600** Alaskans will receive premium tax credits to help make health insurance even more affordable. [HealthReform.gov, accessed [3/20/10](#)] During the first five years that the health insurance Exchange is operational, Alaskans will receive **\$850 million** in premium and cost-sharing tax credits to further reduce the cost of health insurance. [Senate Finance Committee]

Finally, health reform will open access to Medicaid for **49,996** newly eligible Alaskans, by expanding eligibility to non-elderly parents, childless adults, children and pregnant women with income up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level. [Urban Institute, [1/25/10](#)] The federal government will fully fund the cost of covering these newly eligible individuals for three years and will pay 90 percent of these costs after 2020, compared to the current contribution in Alaska of 51.4 percent of costs. In total, Alaska could receive **\$2 billion** in federal funding during just the first five years of this coverage expansion. [Senate Finance Committee]

### ***Affordable Coverage Options for Alaska Young Adults***

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, “Young adults often lose their health insurance if covered under a parent’s or guardian’s policy at age 19 or upon graduation from high school or college.” [NCSL, accessed [3/20/10](#)] Starting this year, **76,354** young adults in Alaska will be able to remain covered by their parent’s insurance policy until age 26. [U.S. Census Bureau, [1/7/10](#)] In addition, once the health insurance Exchanges are operational in 2014, **121,291** Alaskans under age 30 will have access to less costly catastrophic-only health insurance plans. [U.S. Census Bureau, [1/7/10](#)] These plans will also be available to others who are exempt from the individual responsibility policy.

### ***Job Creation***

A recent analysis found that slowing the growth rate of health care costs will make it more profitable for businesses to expand employment, leading to estimated job gains nationwide of 250,000 – 400,000 per year for the next decade as a result of health reform. [Center for American Progress, [1/10](#)] For Alaska, this could mean **700 - 1,200** new jobs each year. [U.S. Public Interest Research Group, [1/20/10](#)]

### ***Support for Alaska Community Health Centers***

Community health centers provide critical health care to Alaskans, regardless of their ability to pay. Health reform makes an immediate and substantial investment in the **174** federally-funded health centers in Alaska. [National Association of Community Health Centers, [2009](#)]